

Eternity Daily Bible Study

(A ministry of Eternity Christian Fellowship)

Walking In The Spirit - 92

Topic: Fifteen Useful Spiritual Principles

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The following spiritual principles are ones that I use in my teaching over and over again. These are perspective statements – large over-arching principles that draw many doctrines together into one place. I share them because I think that others in ministry may also find them useful:

1. ***The goal of the Christian life is maturity and godly character*** (Ephesians 3:14-21). We are to end up in the image of God's beloved Son (Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:49, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Colossians 3:10, 1 John 3:1-3). This is our true inheritance – to be satisfied with His image when we awake (Psalm 17:15). To this end God has given us all the blessings in the heavenly realms so that we might appropriate them in the process of becoming like Christ (Eph 1:3,4).
2. ***The Holy Spirit is God, resident in human personality, with the power to change it*** (a quote from Emil Brunner). Cooperation with the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Word of God, which He inspired, is a great key to Christian growth. It is as we set our mind on the things of the Spirit that we experience life and peace and find power over lusts and temptation (1 Corinthians 6:11,19; 2 Corinthians 3:16-18, Romans 8:4-6, Galatians 5:16-18).
3. ***We need to consciously and deliberately yearn to be like Christ, we need to make Christ our one and only aim.*** We cannot be content with merely human or religious standards. Just because others say we are good, does not mean that we are yet 'good enough'. Even Paul said that he had 'not yet attained the goal'. Every thought, attitude and action should be reflected on in the light of Scripture and brought into captivity to Christ (Philippians 3:10-16, 1 Corinthians 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 10:5, 13:5)
4. ***We resist the Spirit whenever we refuse to go along with His work of changing us into the image of God.*** This may happen in three ways. Firstly if we refuse to repent and believe in Jesus - so that we do not become Christians at all. Secondly it can also mean quenching the Spirit's supernatural activities (1 Thessalonians 5:18-20) or grieving the Spirit by refusing to cooperate with Him in the process of Christian sanctification - for instance by holding on to rage, anger, grudges, malice and slander (Ephesians 4:30-32). Thirdly we can turn back under the pressure of persecution (Luke 9:57-62, Hebrews 10:32-39) or totally reject the things of the Spirit (Hebrews 6:4-9, 2 Peter 2:20-22). We are not allowed to press "Pause" and stop our spiritual growth as soon as it becomes uncomfortable. Carrying our cross means dying to self daily, rejoicing in persecution and having saintly endurance. These tough things are part of the challenge of the Christian life. Disciples must count the cost. The fact that our flesh objects to work of the Spirit is no reason to stop the process of becoming like Christ. (Mark 8:34-38, Luke 14:26-35)

5. ***We only receive as much grace as we think we need*** (James 4:6,7). God only fills empty vessels. The poor in spirit enter the Kingdom of God. Those who mourn are comforted. Those who are hungry for righteousness are filled (Matthew 5:3-12). But those who think they are rich are sent away empty-handed (Luke 1:53), and those who think they are 'experts' are made into fools (1 Corinthians 3:18-20). The humble publican found righteousness while the proud Pharisee received nothing. Every single example of grace in the New Testament was toward people who had a need or who expressed a need. The members of the church of Laodecia, who thought they needed nothing, were in danger of being 'spat out' by Jesus. (Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 18:9-14, Revelation 3:14-22)
6. ***Grace is given so that we might become holy.*** Grace is not a free pass to sin, a sort of "Get Out of Hell Free" card. Grace is given as an enabling unto righteousness (Romans 5:21). Grace is given so that we might have the opportunity and the power to "get back on the bicycle" and become the image of God in Christ. (Romans 6:1-11)
7. ***The Christian life is not just interior, it is also exterior.*** Over time we must bear fruit. Good must come out of us. Though we are saved by grace through faith that is not the end of the story. As we become like Christ we will do good works as a reflection of our new nature that is created in the image of God and do good works that were created beforehand for us to perform (Ephesians 2:8-10). Faith must lead to a changed character and a truly changed character must lead to a changed lifestyle. (Matthew 5:16, Galatians 6:10, 2 Thessalonians 2:17, Titus 2:14, 3:8)
8. ***Doctrinal knowledge alone does not save.*** The Devil has a knowledge of good doctrine, he just does not obey it! (James 2:19) The Pharisees believed in God, the Bible, the Ten commandments, angels, prophecy, the resurrection and the final judgment, kept the Sabbath and tithed regularly- but were locked out of the Kingdom of God. (Matthew 8:10-12, 23:23-28, James 2:14-26)
9. ***If our lifestyle is worse than that of an unbeliever then we have denied the faith*** (1 Timothy 5:8). While this principle originally applies to supporting one's family it also implies we are to be better than the world around us. We are not to share their materialistic anxieties about food and drink and clothing instead we are to trust God. We are not just to love those who love us – but also we should love our enemies. We are not just to lend to those who can give a return but also to those who cannot repay. If we don't live better than those without the Spirit how can it be said that we have the Spirit? We are to be in the image of God not the image of the world. The love of the Father must be in us (1 John 2:15-17, 3:10-18).
10. ***The spiritual life flows from a sensitive and Spirit-filled conscience*** which sees and hears the things of God and which is tuned into the love, the will and the wisdom of God. God teaches us through the Spirit. We learn first from God, in an interior way. We can only teach the spiritual man for the person without the Spirit cannot comprehend the things of God. We are to minister, preach and teach with this in view. (1 Corinthians 2:9-16, John 14:26, 1 John 2:20,27)

11. ***A lifestyle of being 'in a hurry' is a quick path to Hell.*** When we are in a hurry we lose our patience with others and with it our kindness, our peace, our joy, our love and our self-control. All the fruits of the Spirit fall off the tree. Without spiritual fruit we are thrown aside and cast into the fire (John 15:1-8). As Martin Luther said "Hurry is not of the Devil, it IS the Devil." Thus we should limit our activity level to that which we can pursue while still being a fruitful, godly and spiritual Christian of good conscience, morals and character (Matthew 7:16-23).
12. ***If we continually hate our bother we will end up in spiritual darkness*** (1 John 2:9-11) and cannot progress in the spiritual life. Rage blinds us. Sin and folly surely follow. The anger of man does not result in the righteousness of God. Anger must be for a specific purpose and for a very limited time (Ephesians 4:26,27). Unless we forgive, we will not be forgiven. The heart of vendetta and of murderous rage, like the heart of Cain, does not inherit eternal life (1 John 3:10-15).
13. ***There are two kinds of judgment in the New Testament.*** The first is "krino" judgment, which is judgment of the whole person, judgment like an angry magistrate passing a death sentence. This is not permitted to Christians. The other kind of judgment is dokimazo judgment which is partial in nature, like a performance review, and is gracious and thoughtful and examines attribute by single attribute, action by single action. Rebuke for a certain sin or a particular action may be necessary, but the entire person is never to be judged. Where possible the sin is to be corrected and got rid of and the person restored and blessed. The aim is to help the person become all that they should be in Christ. (Galatians 6:1-5, 2 Timothy 3:16,17, Matthew 7:1-5, Luke 6:37, Hebrews 5:14)
14. ***There is nothing less important than being important.*** Our sense of importance can cause us to treat other people with disdain. A habit of prideful scorning and rejecting of others is a direct contradiction to the Spirit of Christ. Self-importance can cause us to disobey the commandments of God (for instance through treating the poor with contempt, being critical, judging and excluding others, lashing out in anger at minor irritations etc.) When we do this we are effectively making 'self' into an idol; choosing to obey the demands of our ego rather than the demands of God! We should be humble, gracious, lowly servants instead and wash the feet of one another. It is the last who become first. It is those who become as the least among the brethren who become the greatest of all. (Matthew 20:25-28, 23:11,12 Mark 9:33-37, Luke 22:24-27, John 13:1-17)
15. ***As a general rule of thumb, God will treat us as we have treated others.*** This especially applies to those we have power over such as orphans, widows, the poor, our wives, our children and our employees. Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy (Matthew 5:7). Those who do not judge, are not judged, those who do not condemn are not condemned, and those who forgive are forgiven and the generous receive a great reward, pressed down and running over (Luke 6:38). Those who give a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple are remembered in Heaven (Matthew 10:42). God is patient with those who are patient with others who irritate and abuse them (Luke 6:27-35) - in fact great is their reward in Heaven! Those who were kind to 'these the least of my brethren' are remembered

as those who did a good deed for Christ Himself! (Matthew 25:32-40) But those who judge will be judged with the same measure they have used on others (Matthew 7:1-5, James 2:12,13). The proud will be humbled (James 4:6). The harsh husband who does not listen with understanding to the needs of his wife, will in turn not have his prayers unanswered by God (1Peter 3:7). God is merciful to the merciful, upright to the upright, and pure with the pure but He is also shrewd with the shrewd and outwits the craftiness of men (Psalm 18:25,26). The poor are always among us (Mark 14:7) and how we treat them is vital. The rich man who ignored the evident needs of Lazarus the beggar ends up in eternal torment (Luke 6:19-31). The rich farmers who refused to pay their laborers will find their gold and silver burning their flesh in Hell (James 5:1-5). And those who ignored the needs of the 'least of my brethren' and whose lives were ruled by unconscious and habitual selfishness are seen as hateful unto Christ (Matthew 25:41-46). We are not saved by our works, we are saved by our faith (Ephesians 2:8-10). However our reward, happiness and progress toward the image of God depends a great deal on treating others well and loving our neighbors as ourselves. This is the great commandment that fulfills the whole Law (Romans 13:8-10)

Blessings,

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